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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000014

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN PLATEAU STATE

REF: 01 ABUJA 2255

Classified by CDA Andrews for reason 1.5 (d.)

11. (U) Summary: December 30-31 communal violence in Plateau State has resulted in numerous deaths and scattered property damage. Death estimates range between 33 and 90 people. The proximate cause of the encounters was the perennial competition over land between cattle herders (mostly Hausa/Fulani) and farmers (ethnic Biroms.) The fighting occurred near Vom, approximately 10 miles south of the state capital, Jos, and did not approach Jos. The military has been deployed and the Vom area is quiet. Consular wardens report that Jos is also calm and that no Amcits were caught in the melee. End summary.

12. (U) According to a statement issued by the Plateau State Government and carried by the local press, the violence erupted when forty armed men attacked the home of the district head of Vwang district in the Jos South Local Government Area during the early morning hours of December 130. Eighteen people reportedly were killed, including eight attackers who were shot after being pursued by a joint army-police security task force. (Comment: Press reports referred to the culprits as "foreign bandits." That these raiders were non-Nigerians who crossed an international border to carry out this attack seems unlikely. More plausible is that the press picked up on the local usage of "foreign," which would imply the attackers were Hausa/Fulani or some other ethnic group not considered "indigenous" to the area. The other major ethnic groups in the Jos vicinity pejoratively consider Hausa/Fulani as alien to the area although they have resided there since the 19th century and were the cardinal force behind the founding of Jos in the early 1900's. End comment.)

13. (SBU) That the Birom attributed the December 30 attack to the Hausa/Fulani soon became evident. Later in the day, reprisal attacks were carried out against Hausa/Fulani resident in the Vwang district. Some of these attacks may have continued until December 31. Death estimates from the reprisals range from 15 to 70. (The higher figure comes from Dutch expatriates working in the vicinity.) The news of the original attacks and the reprisals spread quickly, causing many Plateau State inhabitants to fear a replay of the early September violence that claimed over 2,000 lives in Jos. Several hundreds, mostly of Hausa/Fulani apparently sought refuge from the feared escalation at the 3rd armored Division barracks in Rukuba. Also many merchants in Jos hurriedly closed shop or refused to open on hearing of the clashes, according to Colonel Mohammed Inra Idris, Special Assistant to National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed.

14. (SBU) Idris discounted any direct connection between the December 30-31 flare ups and the earlier September violence. Instead, this latter episode seemed very localized, confined to the district around Vom. Professor John Elaigwu at the Institute of Governance and Social Responsibility at the University of Jos also concurred with this assessment. Elaigwu, who served as Director General of the Inter-governmental Institute on Conflict Resolution during the Abacha years, stated that the violence was the product of perennial dispute over land usage between cattle herders and farmers. Particularly during the dry season, fertile land is at a premium. Competition between those who seek the land for grazing and those who want it for cultivation is heightened. In this case, the pressure gradually built until reaching a point where it had to be vented. Religion crept into the equation as at most a secondary consideration. Herders tend to be Hausa/Fulani Muslims while the farmers are ethnic Birom and Anguta, who are mainly Christian.

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Return To Calm, For Now  
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15. (U) Security forces and the Plateau State Government seem

to have reacted swiftly to contain the violence. Approximately 150 soldiers and policemen have been deployed to the troubled area. The State Government has also tightened the midnight curfew established after the September eruption.

16. (U) Amcit wardens report the American Community is well but note concerns among their Nigerian acquaintances that further violence could erupt if forces relax their vigilance or reduce their presence

17. (C) Comment: the temptation to draw a causal link between the September Jos violence and what just happened in Vom is understandable. While a few observers have attempted this nexus, the weight of evidence suggests no direct connection between the two episodes. The December 30-31 violence appears the result of chronic land use competition that unfortunately went from bad to worse for many of the area's inhabitants. Yet, given the high anxiety and residual tension in Plateau State as a result of the September trouble, authorities are concerned that violence of any sort can spread and take on larger dimensions. For now, it appears that the authorities halted this potential dynamic before it could expand and assume a more minatory ethnic or religious coloration. End comment.  
Andrews